

VZCZCXRO3579
OO RUEHBI RUEHLMC
DE RUEHLM #0603/01 1131213
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 231213Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5900
INFO RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0349
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0046
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7027
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5112
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3684
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0877
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3764
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1063
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2845
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7602
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5303
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0187
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1977
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000603

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS
MCC FOR S GROFF, D NASSIRY, E BURKE AND F REID

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/23/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: GSL DENIES TRAVEL CLEARANCE TO
NORWEGIAN AMBASSADOR AS BOMBING IN NORTH INTENSIFIES

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b, d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On April 23, the Ministry of Defense denied clearance for Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar to travel to Kilinochchi for a previously scheduled, regular meeting with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). On April 22 Associated Press correspondent Matthew Rosenberg (strictly protect) returned from a five-day trip to Kilinochchi, during which he met with various LTTE representatives. Rosenberg reported that the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) carried out regular aerial bombings, with artillery fire lasting throughout each night of his stay. Despite informing the military of his specific travel arrangements, the SLAF bombed so close to Rosenberg during one excursion to see a destroyed village that he was ultimately forced to abandon that portion of his trip. Rosenberg stated LTTE cadres were rapidly preparing for an "invasion" and that even the most humble farmers had dug homemade bomb shelters behind their houses. End Summary.

NORWEGIAN TRIP POSTPONED

¶2. (C) Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar told DCM and Ambassador on April 22 that he had been asked to postpone a planned, relatively routine trip to Kilinochchi the following day. Brattskar told us that Foreign Secretary (and GSL Peace Secretariat head) Palitha Kohona had contacted him, saying he

SIPDIS
was under instructions to tell Brattskar not to go to Kilinochchi at this time because of unspecified security concerns. Brattskar also said that that it was his understanding that the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission had been denied access to Mannar. The Norwegian Embassy told DCM on April 23 that Brattskar would be in touch with the GSL to try to reschedule the trip.

13. (C) One SLMM contact we were able to reach was unaware of the proposed trip to Mannar, but noted that the crossing into LTTE-held territory at Omathai was insecure and closed frequently because of rising tensions and outbreaks of hostilities. He also pointed out that the Vavuniya-Mannar highway had been "critical" from a security point of view at least since the incursion by GSL forces in the vicinity of Madhu Church in mid-March. (We have unconfirmed reports that SLA casualties were quite high during this operation -- 51 dead and 171 wounded -- but the Defense Ministry has apparently preferred to play down its losses in this engagement.)

A RARE VISIT BY A FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT TO THE NORTH

14. (C) AP reporter Matthew Rosenberg (strictly protect) briefed poloff about his recent trip to Kilinochchi to meet the LTTE. He stated that he heard aerial bombardment on a regular basis throughout his five-day trip, and that artillery fire lasted most of each night. This caused him to wonder whether this was the beginning of new phase of the government's military campaign against the Tigers. Although Rosenberg was able to travel freely within certain areas of LTTE-controlled territory, the LTTE refused to escort him to some places Rosenberg visited during a previous trip to the Tiger-controlled Vanni last year. For security reasons, Rosenberg decided to travel with the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) in an attempt to view a village the LTTE claimed was destroyed by SLAF bombs. The village was located adjacent to a Sea Tiger base Rosenberg had seen the year before, but the LTTE refused him access to the area on this trip. The SLMM informed the SLAF of their plans to examine the village, but the SLAF continued bombing areas so close by

COLOMBO 00000603 002 OF 002

that Rosenberg and the SLMM were forced to abandon that portion of the trip.

15. (C) Rosenberg stated that the LTTE was obviously preparing for war. Civilians throughout the area had dug homemade bunkers, and LTTE cadres were building deep trenches with large log bulwarks along A-9 highway. During Rosenberg's trip last year there was an emphasis by the LTTE on their "political side." However, during this trip, almost everyone he met, other than civilians, were dressed in military fatigues. (Note: The LTTE website Tamilnet is reporting that more than 2000 soldiers from SLA "deep penetration units" are massed along the Forward Defense Line (FDL) in the Jaffna peninsula.)

16. (C) During Rosenberg's meetings with LTTE political spokesman Tamilchelvan and military spokesman Ilanthirayan, the Tigers emphasized their willingness to fight, the changes they have made to appease international criticism and their desire that the international community, "especially the United States," harshly criticize the GSL for human rights abuses and the destruction of the Ceasefire Agreement. When Rosenberg pressed his interlocutor about their ability to withstand a sustained military offensive "for two or three years," the LTTE implied that they were resigned to continue fighting, even if they lost control of territory. They did not equate being driven from a particular area as defeat, stating that they had lost territory in the past, only to regain it later.

17. (C) COMMENT: Rosenberg's report tracks others that GSL bombardment of LTTE targets in the north has escalated significantly in recent days. Certainly the SLAF has been trying to locate the LTTE's light planes and eliminate them if possible. An Israeli-built unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) went down in the Mullaitivu area on April 20. Military sources told us they were able to recover the UAV, but it is not currently operational. The most likely explanation for denying travel clearance to Brattskar is that the Defense

Ministry was concerned that he would not be safe during this window. The evidence on whether the long-expected government offensive in the north is imminent is contradictory. Some observers feel it is more likely to come in early summer, perhaps in June. However, no one -- least of all the Tigers -- seems to doubt at this point that it is coming.

BLAKE